

THE FLYING SQUADRON

Skirmish of the Future in the Sky.

PROPHECY OF AVIATORS

Claude Grahame - White and Harry Harper Write a Book on Aeronautic Warfare.

The "Aeroplane in War," by Claude Grahame-White and Harry Harper, will not only ally anxiety as to Britain's future in the air.

The development of aeroplanes, especially for war purposes, the best types of machines, the severe training of airmen, and the exacting duties required of them, are all admirably described. We are told by the authors how opposing squadrons will meet in combat in the sky.

"Armed aeroplanes will accompany each reconnaissance machine when it is about to set out over the enemy's position. These armed craft, or aerial cruisers, will most likely circle around the scouting machine, so as to open fire upon any hostile aeroplanes which approach."

"One prominent constructor suggests that such fighting units should be fitted with a gun firing a small explosive shell, something like a pom-pom."

Speaking of the "aerial battles" that are certain to precede the land actions of the future, the authors think that the fast "cruisers," which will carry machine guns (a gun has already been fitted to a bi-plane), will come into speedy conflict. After maneuvering for position, the opponents will open fire.

"After a preliminary exchange of shots, the machines will sweep to closer range, and then one of them, 'winged' by well directed fire, will be put out of action and will flutter away earthward."

"An ability to 'climb' rapidly, combined with high speed, will, indeed, prove invaluable to the fighting machine. If it can do so it will undoubtedly seek to rise above an antagonist and destroy it with a well-directed missile."

TO FIGHT LIKE BIRDS.
The late Captain Ferber prophesied that aeroplanes would fight "in the same way as all fights between birds have ever taken place."

Speaking of types of war aeroplanes, the authors state that in addition to "cruisers," it is suggested by many experts that a fighting aeroplane, carrying a heavier gun or guns—a sort of aerial Dreadnought, in fact—should be constructed. The aim of such a machine would be to attack antagonists at long range.

As one tries to picture a cloud of these deadly birds of prey, rising higher and higher in the air, like furious hawks, one thinks of Tennyson's prophetic lines:

Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there
From the nation's airy navies grappling in the
central blue.

But there will be no "grappling" if the combatants can help it. Anything rather than that!

With regard to an aeroplane attack on the Thames Valley, between Hammarham and Gravesend, the authors quote "a military expert of high repute" as saying:

"This whole fifty miles of concentrated essence of empire lies at the absolute mercy of an aerial machine, which could plant a dozen incendiary missiles in certain pre-selected spots."

A CITY'S DESTRUCTION OVERNIGHT

The authors add the following words—
"It would only be a matter of time, while discussing the destructive capabilities of modern type aeroplanes, that a famous constructor showed how—if a large fleet of machines were marshalled together—it would be possible for an enemy to drop a couple of hundred tons of explosive matter upon London, suddenly appearing from across the channel by air, and as quickly flying back again."

The experiment of dropping a stream of dummy bombs at night on an encampment of dragons has actually been carried out in Germany. The machines planned down silently, and the bombs "fell all about the camp fires." Then the engines were started before the dragons had recovered from their surprise, and the machines vanished in the darkness.

It is very evident that the nation that is best equipped in the matter of aeroplanes will have a tremendous initial advantage—probably a winning advantage—in war. Let us see Great Britain's position now as compared with other nations.

Take France, the pioneers of the new arm. After the historic Picardy manoeuvre of 1910, the development of military aeroplaning was pushed forward. Early in the present year France had 300 pilots and 24 machines. At the end of this year she will probably have 400 machines, as well as nearly 1,000 privately owned machines, which would be called upon by the end of 1914 the government hopes for 1,600 machines, and, add the authors, in 1917 several thousands are anticipated.

At the end of 1911 Germany had about 100 war machines and nearly 100 airmen. The book states that secrecy is now shadowing German operations (a sure sign of activity), but probably there are more than 100 machines. Some estimates go as high as 300.

THE GREAT POWERS INTERESTED.
Russia has forty machines in May last year, and has just decided to order 150 more of the Nieuport type, of which 100 are to be made in the country. That is one way of stimulating home production.

The United States, Austria, Italy, Spain and Japan are also quoted in the book as actively developing their aeroplane service. We alone are lagging.

Viscount Haldane told a deputation of the Parliamentary aerial defence committee last year that it was "desirable to move cautiously." The War Office should not, in his opinion, "commit itself to an idea which, in the present rapid development of aviation, might become obsolete in a few months." The authors point out that experience is gained even if machines become obsolete, and that even battleships become old-fashioned.

The government's programme in regard to naval and military armaments for 1912-13 came out when the greater portion of this book was in the press, but comment is increased. A sum of £308,000 is set aside for the year, and £177,000 on the previous year. France has voted £200,000, and Germany £100,000 has been subscribed. Our scheme, say the authors, is to form seven aeroplanes squadrons, each comprising twelve aeroplanes, and to man this air fleet a force of 364 pilots and observers will be required. For scouting purposes the pilots are required, while the observer takes notes of the country beneath. In addition, there will be forty airmen, who will be trained specifically in the duties of naval armaments.

ENGLAND THE ONLY LAGGARD.

The verdict of the authors is:
"The facilities actually provided—as apart from paper schemes—are still so meagre that it will only be possible during this year to train a very small proportion of the corps set forth above. Thus it is to be feared that at the end of 1912 our position will continue to compare most unfavorably with that of either France or Germany."

"We are more than a year behind and seem likely to remain so."
The authors have nothing but praise for the officers of the army and navy. They are splendid. But the government—
"After reading this most absorbing book."

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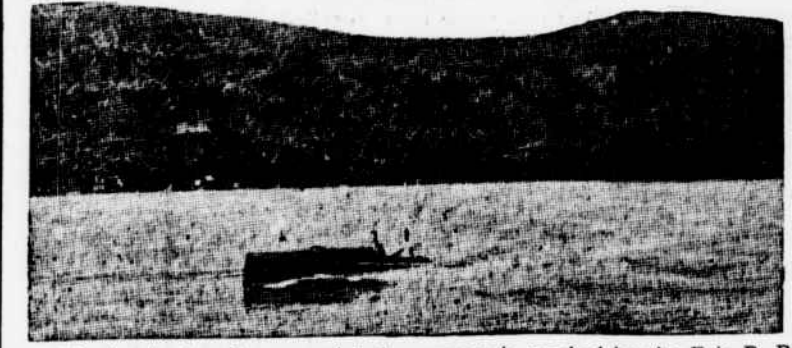
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